

when he began, and had dwindled away to almost nothing when he voluntarily resigned.

Early in 1797 he took up his abode at Chichester as the minister of a general Baptist church. He remained there about two years and a half, and applied himself with considerable earnestness to his pastoral duties.³ But though treated, "says Foster's biographer, Mr. Ryland, "with much personal kindness, he met with little encouragement to prosecute his labours. A spirit of religious indifference seems to have pervaded the society; frequent deaths and removals reduced its numbers, and not long after his departure it became extinct."

About midsummer, 1799, Foster left Chichester and went to Battersea. Here he was kept rather busy. "I have preached," he says, "several of the Sabbaths, and made a journey of perhaps forty miles in the country to preach to *heathens*, at one place, in a sort of coal-hole; and to plain good saints at another, in a little shop. I stood behind the counter, and some of the candles hanging above touched my wig."³¹ He also took charge of a score of African black boys, who had been brought over to this country by some philanthropic traders to be civilized. About this time he first met Miss Maria Snooke, "the friend" to whom the essays here reprinted were first addressed. It was she who afterwards became his wife.

In 1800 he made another move and pitched his tent in the village of Downend, five miles from Bristol, where he preached regularly at a little chapel erected by Dr. Caleb Evans. After a residence at Downend of four years he was invited to become the minister of a congregation meeting in Sheppard's Barton, Frome, "a large and surpassingly ugly town, in Somersetshire." He accepted the invitation, one great inducement being that the stipend was considerably higher than at Downend.

It was during his residence at Frome that the *Essays*, by which Foster attained his great celebrity, were published. They appear to have originated in his conversations with his interesting friend (afterwards Mrs. Foster) while on a visit to her brother-in-law, the late Dr. Joseph Mason Cox, of Overn.³² In our many conversations while you were here, Foster observes in a letter designed to be introductory to the *Essays*, "it could not fail to occur to us, by